

## **26th January - A Date with the Past-2009**

### **A Date with the Past**

Time flies. But we seem to have no experience of it - we, who are caught up in our day-to-day struggles ...and ambitions ...and responsibilities. Sometimes, we are busy helping the economy grow. And at other times we are trying to figure out how to ensure that our children become responsible adults, our homes become beautiful and our families harmonious. All that distracts us from the invariable truth - that time flies! And then suddenly, a reminder comes along!

Mine came when Neeraj Kodesia called me up to tell me that it was the time for our Alumni's Silver Jubilee meet-that 25 years had lapsed since our passing out from school...and that we must meet to plan for this jubilee event on 26th January! It was as if a very faint memory was whispering from behind the smokescreen of my busy life.

I kept the phone down and told my wife, "Unbelievable! 25 years have gone by! I will have to go for a planning meeting for our jubilee celebrations." She said, "Good for you! Have fun...!" Little did I know at the time that this new thing that I mundanely put into my "to do" list would have special significance in my life.

When I went for the first meeting, I experienced something quite strange. Firstly, the people I met were all as if out of a school play. They had zinc oxide on their hair to make it look gray... and small pillows under their shirts to make them look fat! But I could recognize them instantly - because of their eyes. The same eyes that I would have seen, throughout junior, middle or high school. But the rest of them had changed - so much! The other strange thing was that while the rest of me had changed - in my ability to deal with what's going on and how to respond to it - my core relationship to my school mates seemed unchanged. It was as if all my emotions had been refrigerated for 25 years. As if, towards them, I could only feel emotions that children could feel - extreme and intense, lacking the usual tact, polish and poise that had been so well crafted over time.

But the trust did not build up immediately. It took several meetings in our run up to the 25th anniversary. Some in which "The Planning Committee" met to decide the food menu, activities, gifts, collections and many other things. But with each passing meeting, we started to rebuild a little more trust and find a little more of ourselves that we had forgotten. A part of ourselves that was covered by the dust of intense action spanning 25 years! It was as if we had dated our own past. But before accepting it as our partner for the journey into

the future, we had to carefully tread this quaintly unfamiliar ground. With each meeting and with each new old classmate joining the growing group of "Alumni Planners" – from five to ten to twenty to thirty – the trust was rebuilt!

To be a little less poetic, we had about 8 meetings in our run up to the actual event. Invariably, all of them, would start as a planning meeting and end up as a great social get together – with much merriment, food and drinks! And eventually, at the end of such gatherings, Neeraj, Prabhakar, Sachin or Vajjainthy would sing. Instantly, we would get reminded of an emotion that we had not accessed for a bit.

Some of us also wanted to play a competitive team sport against the current 12th graders of MIS. Should it be cricket? No, that would mean a lot of running around, and our old bones may not allow that. Should it be soccer? You got to be kidding! Basketball? Only Rahul can do that! Maybe, only he should play and the rest of us should do "Ra! Ra!!" Or should it be volleyball? That sounds right! Nobody needs to move more than 3 or 4 steps. We could always practice at Sanjay's farmhouse. So volleyball it was!

Simultaneously, we debated other things. How many dishes? Who will cater? How many people? What will the kids do? What should be the gifts for our teachers? How much money should we collect?

And then it was 26th January! On the day of the event, we all wore the same jerseys. As if after 25 years, we had a second chance to wear the same uniform. Batch mates had come from all over the world. Around 55 of them out of a batch of 97! Recognizing and acknowledging each other was itself great fun. These were people we had grown up with - people in whose company we did not need to say much – and yet everything got communicated. The great gap of 25 years had not altered that fact. We looked into each others eyes and shook hands; each and every one of us felt the warmth and reassurance of recognition...and of recognizing! Like in Jerry McGuire, we all had each other at "hello"!

Since we were the hosting batch, we eagerly looked forward to the other batches coming in. And they did. Finally, there were 750 of us – all successful people, having passed out of this great school at different points of time over a span of 40 years or so.

Everybody loved the menu, the kids had a whale of a time and, of course we valiantly played volleyball...and almost won the first match. But then, to put it euphemistically, we let the youngsters win! The good news is that some of the people bitten by this fitness bug continue to meet every other Sunday and play some sport. Many of us continue to meet socially, as if we have rediscovered the treasure trove of friendship!

Lastly, it was really great to meet with our teachers and mentors. The Mother's blessings had come in our lives in the form of these teachers and mentors. They made of us the hero warriors we aspired to become. So that we could fight the great battle of the future that was to be born against a past that sought to endure...so that new things could manifest and we were ready to receive them! And with their renewed blessings, we will continue... more vibrantly than ever before...for the next 25 years!

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**Batch of 1980**